CHRIST'S

OWN

MODE OF BAPTISM.

BY

REV. SAMUEL J. BAIRD, D.D.,

PASTOR, RONCEVERTE, W. VA.

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CHRIST'S OWN MODE OF BAPTISM.

INQUIRER. It was my expectation, my dear pastor, to have sought before this the privilege of admission to the communion of your church, but I have been greatly perplexed from reading this tract, which has been placed in my hands by a Baptist friend. It would appear from it that according to the testimony of many eminent divines of all denominations, Luther and Calvin included, "*baptism*" is "*immersion.*"

PASTOR. I will not occupy time in questioning, as I might, the fairness of the references and fidelity of the quotations here given. Nor will I trouble you by citing other witnesses, as learned, and some of whom have devoted more attention to the subject than any of these, and have come to an opposite conclusion. But I observe that the title is *Learned Witnesses to Christ's Ordinances.* Would it not have been more satisfactory if, instead of appeal to Christ's fal-

lible servants, the writer had favored us with Christ's own testimony?

INQUIRER. But we are compelled to resort to the authority of learned men to ascertain what is the meaning of Christ's words on the subject.

PASTOR. If you will permit me, I think I can show you that Jesus has so clearly set forth his own meaning that we need no other interpreter than the plain words of our common English Bible.

INQUIRER. Do me that favor, and I shall be greatly relieved and much indebted to you.

PASTOR. When Jesus took water and washed the disciples' feet, saying, "I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done unto you" (John xiii. 15), was his meaning doubtful?

INQUIRER. Certainly not. His action made it plainer than words could do.

PASTOR. Christ has set us an example as to baptism even more decisive than this of washing the disciples' feet.

INQUIRER. I did not know that Jesus ever baptized at all.

PASTOR. Let us, then, first examine that point. May I trouble you to find and read Matthew iii. 11?

INQUIRER. "I indeed *baptize you* with water unto repentance; but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear. He shall *baptize you* with the Holy Ghost and with fire." So says John the Baptist respecting Jesus. But this is something very different from that for which we are looking.

PASTOR. Are we not looking for the form of action which Jesus required when he commanded us to baptize?

INQUIRER. That is true, and I now see that if we can ascertain the form of action with which Jesus baptized we will have an infallible guide as to the mode in which we should fulfil his command to baptize.

PASTOR. So important is this baptizing office of Christ that John's testimony to it is given by each one of the four evangelists as the beginning and of the very essence of the gospel. (See Mark i. 8; Luke iii. 16; John i. 33.) In fact, it is as important as is his

atoning priesthood; for it is the very means through which, giving his Holy Spirit to his people, he unites them to himself and bestows on them the benefits of his salvation. From what we have seen we may set down two things as unquestionable:

1. *Jesus does baptize.*

2. *He baptizes, not with water, but with the Holy Ghost.*

INQUIRER. When did he enter on this office?

PASTOR. Two occasions are signalized in the New Testament. The first was the day of Pentecost. In the last discourse of Jesus to his disciples at the table the night of his betrayal he had forewarned them that he must go away to the Father to receive the Holy Spirit, in order that he might send that Spirit, the Comforter, to them. (John xii. 16, 26; xv. 26; xvi. 7.) This expected gift to him of the Spirit he afterward refers to as "the promise of the Father." (Luke xxiv. 49; Acts i. 4; ii. 33.) Respecting it he commanded the apostles that for the present "they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait

for *the promise of the Father*, which, saith he, ye have heard of me. For John truly *baptized* with water, but ye shall be *baptized* with the Holy Ghost, not many days hence." (Acts i. 4, 5.) "Not many days."—They waited ten days after his ascension. Will you read, in Acts ii. 1–4, what then took place?

INQUIRER. "And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them cloven tongues, like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance."

PASTOR. Thus with signal miracles of demonstration was the baptism of the Spirit given.

INQUIRER. I have heard it said that this was an immersion, for the Holy Ghost "filled all the house," and thus, of course, surrounded and immersed those who were in it.

PASTOR. If you will again look at the

place (Acts ii. 2), you will see that it was not the Holy Ghost, but "a sound from heaven," that filled the place. But Jesus was not to baptize in sound. Respecting the Holy Ghost the statement of the text is the exact reverse of the Baptist theory. The Spirit was not on the outside of the disciples, surrounding and immersing them, but within them: "They were all *filled* with the Holy Ghost." An outside presence of the Spirit such as immersion implies would do no one any good. "He shall be *in* you," said Jesus. But we have not yet had all the light on the subject. Will you please read Peter's words, from the same chapter, verses 16–18?

INQUIRER. "But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel. And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will *pour out* of my Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams, and on my servants and on my handmaidens will I *pour out* in those days of my Spirit; and they shall prophesy."

PASTOR. Peter thus testifies that the Lord's action on this occasion was an *outpouring*, and that it was a fulfilment of the prophecies, exemplified from Joel, of God's purpose to pour out his Spirit in the gospel day. Peter goes on to show that this outpouring was the *baptism* which Jesus was to administer, as you will see in verses 32, 33.

INQUIRER. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having *received* of the Father *the promise* of the Holy Ghost, he hath *shed forth* this which ye now see and hear."

PASTOR. Jesus was to *baptize* with the Holy Ghost. He had told his disciples of the Father's promise to give him the Spirit for that purpose, upon his ascension, and assured them that upon its fulfilment they should receive the baptism. The Father's promise is now fulfilled, and thereupon the Spirit is shed forth by Jesus, and the baptism is thus given. This was the beginning of the baptizing office of the ascended Jesus.

INQUIRER. You spake of *two* special occa-

sions of the administration of this baptism. What was the second?

PASTOR. The second was as significant as the first. The one was the beginning of the gospel to Israel. The other opened its doors to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. Will you read Acts x. 44–47?

INQUIRER. "While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost *fell on* all them which heard the word. And they of the circumcision, which believed, were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was *poured out* the gift of the Holy Ghost. For they heard them speak with tongues and magnify God. Then answered Peter, Can any man forbid *water*, that these should not be *baptized*, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?"

PASTOR. This narrative of Luke is very explicit. But let us hear Peter's own account of the matter as given in the next chapter, Acts xi. 15, 16.

INQUIRER. "As I began to speak, the Holy Ghost *fell on* them, as on us at the beginning. Then remembered I the word

of the Lord, how that he said, John, indeed, *baptized* with water, but ye shall be *baptized* with the Holy Ghost."

PASTOR. Here the scene is identified with that of Pentecost by Peter's statement that it was "as on us at the beginning." From the two accounts of this transaction the following particulars appear: 1. The action, that "on the Gentiles was *poured out* the gift of the Holy Ghost;" 2. The Spirit thus poured out "*fell on*" them; 3. They thus "received the Holy Ghost;" 4. This was that baptism with the Holy Ghost which Jesus had promised; 5. It was administered by him. Here it may be worthy of your notice that there is nothing said of the house of Cornelius being filled with a sound or wind, or anything else in which an immersion could be imagined.

INQUIRER. In its relation to the form of baptism all this is to me wholly new and conclusive. Jesus assuredly did *baptize* his people with the Spirit on these two occasions, and yet thereon he performed but one action —that of *pouring out* the Spirit. His people

thus *received* and were *filled* with the Spirit. They needed nothing more—Christ could give them nothing more—than was conveyed and implied in this. It certainly was the *baptism* which he had taught them to await.

PASTOR. To the points already ascertained we may, then, add these:

3. *Jesus began to baptize on Pentecost and in the house of Cornelius.*

4. *His only action there was the shedding forth of the Spirit.*

5. *This, therefore, was what he meant by the promise to baptize.*

6. *His command, therefore, to us to baptize with water means that we should shed water on the disciples.*

INQUIRER. In all this there is nothing of *sprinkling*. I should like to have some light on that point, and on the meaning of the form of baptism.

PASTOR. The two points are so nearly related that we can examine them together. You have seen the prophecy of Joel of the pouring out of the Spirit. Will you in that connection read Isaiah xliv. 3, 4?

INQUIRER. "I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground. I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring; and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the watercourses."

PASTOR. You see that Joel and Isaiah speak of the same coming grace, and that the language of Isaiah shows the figure which they use to be that of the descending rain. As the rain is shed down from the clouds, penetrates the earth, softens it and causes the vegetation to germinate and grow, so the Spirit, shed down by Jesus from his throne, enters and softens "the stony heart" and causes the plants of grace to spring and flourish in fruitfulness. Hence Paul's language as to "the *fruits* of the Spirit." (Gal. v. 22; Eph. v. 9, etc.) Other illustrations of this beautiful figure—which runs all through the Scriptures—you will find in Psalm lxxii. 6; Prov. i. 23; Isa. xxxii. 13–15; xlv. 8; Ezek. xxxix. 29; Hos. x. 12; Rom. v. 5; Tit. iii. 5, 6, etc. The figure of the rain gave form to the Levitical sprinklings for purification. (See

Lev. xiv. 7, 51; Num. viii. 7; xix. 18, etc.) With reference to these cleansing rites, the grace of Christ in the bestowal of the Spirit is sometimes spoken of as a sprinkling, as you may see in Ezekiel xxxvi. 25–27.

INQUIRER. "Then will I *sprinkle* clean water upon you and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you."

PASTOR. You at once see that this passage is a prophecy of the very same blessings which Joel predicted, and which the day of Pentecost witnessed. So, again, Isaiah says of the humiliation of Christ, "As many were astonished at thee, his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men, so shall he *sprinkle* many nations." (Isa. lii. 14, 15.) From these scriptures you may see that the two words "pour" and "sprinkle" express the very same action

of sending forth or imparting the Spirit. The relation of these words to each other is illustrated by the language of Elihu in Job xxxvi. 27, 28. Will you read?

INQUIRER. "He maketh small the drops of water; they pour down rain, according to the vapor thereof, which the clouds do drop and distil upon man abundantly."

PASTOR. The drops of rain are *poured* down out of the clouds and *sprinkle* the ground. The words "pour" and "shed" are the same in the original, and express the action of bestowal. *Sprinkling* indicates the distributive and diffusive manner of it. The two forms are essentially one and the same, and alike symbolize the imparting of the Spirit by the Lord Jesus. In these forms the Scriptures everywhere speak of it. On the other hand, you may search the Bible in vain for any reference to the giving or agency of the Spirit under the figure of immersion.

INQUIRER. I am thoroughly satisfied. Jesus knew the meaning of "baptize." At least, he certainly knew his own meaning, when he used the word. He employed it

with reference to the grandest occasion in the history of redemption—that of his own enthronement and entrance on the ministration of the Spirit to his people. He promised to *baptize* them, and he is "faithful and true." But he did not *immerse* them; to *baptize* cannot, then, mean to *immerse*. He promised to baptize them, and fulfilled the promise by shedding the Spirit upon them. Such a gift as this from Jesus must be the baptism of all baptisms, and was appropriately signalized by the accompanying signs and wonders. Water-baptism is brought into inseparable relation to it by the manner of the apostolic commission: "Tarry, till ye be baptized with the Spirit. Then go, preach the gospel and baptize with water."

Christ's promise was fulfilled by the shedding of the Spirit. His command, therefore, is to be obeyed by the shedding of water; and the form of the latter is a lucid symbol of the grace of the other.

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